

Mint marks born of tradition and publicity

By Roger Boye

Here are the answers to more questions about coins and currency.

Q—Why does the government bother to put mint marks on coins? The letters are small and they seemingly serve no purpose.

F.J., Chicago

A—Mint marks first appeared in ancient times, allowing rulers to trace the source of poorly made coins, particularly those containing precious metal. The purpose remains much the same today because well-struck coins are essential to commerce.

Also, tiny though the letters are publicize the location of government mints, fostering civic pride and perhaps some tourism.

Q—I'm assembling a collection of dimes and quarters using the coins I get in change. What are the "rare dates" from the last 20 years? So far I've found just one pre-1965 silver coin, a 1962 quarter. What's it worth?

B.A., Wheaton

A—Copper-nickel "clad coins" found in circulation are too common to bring any special premium on the hobby market, regardless of date or mint marks. A rare exception to that rule is the 1982 no-mint-mark dime, an "error coin" retailing for as much as \$150 [all 1982 dimes are supposed to carry mint marks].

Your 1962 quarter contains .18 of an ounce of silver, worth about \$1.20 at current metal prices.

Q—Why is green ink used to print serial numbers on U.S. paper money?

P.D., Chicago

A—During the last several decades, officials have selected green to designate Federal Reserve notes, a color that symbolizes sound money for many people. Uncle Sam used blue on silver certificates and red on United States notes, two types of currency no longer issued.

Q—I seem to remember that banks will redeem \$1 silver certificate bills for silver nuggets. Where can I go to trade in my 165 certificates that were printed in the 1950s and 1960s?

P.F., Rantoul

A—A federal law ended the redemption in 1968 following a run on government silver prompted by advancing metal prices. But many persons still are hoarding large numbers of silver certificates.

You can't exchange your bills for silver, and unless they are in uncirculated condition, they have no special value as collectibles.